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# Affective cartographies: emotional mappings of African diasporic narratives in the Global Hispanophone

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines how African literature in Spanish reimagines space, identity, and belonging through affective, linguistic, and embodied strategies that challenge colonial legacies. Focusing on Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's *The Gurugu Pledge*, Ángela Nzambi's *Circle of Women: Stories for Transformation*, and Mohamed El Morabet's *An Abandoned Plot*, it explores how affect, memory, and storytelling transform migration and diaspora into sites of solidarity and resistance. Drawing on affect theory (Ahmed, Deleuze) and decolonial thought (Grosfoguel, Phipps), it argues these texts construct affective cartographies that unsettle hegemonic narratives in multilingual contexts. Ultimately, literature emerges as a political, multisensorial, and pedagogical intervention.

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## Introduction

This work explores how African literature written in Spanish reimagines space, identity, and belonging through emotionally charged narratives that challenge colonial legacies. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze (1995/2006), Sara Ahmed (2004, 2014), and Ramón Grosfoguel (2007), this study examines how affect, embodiment and diasporic experience operate in three texts: *The Gurugu Pledge* by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, *Circle of Women: Stories for Transformation* (*Círculo de mujeres: Relatos para transformar*), and *An Abandoned Plot* (*Un solar abandonado*) by Mohamed El Morabet.

Situated within what Campoy-Cubillo and Sampedro Vizcaya (2019) term the Global Hispanophone – a framework designed to trace cultural production in Spanish beyond its traditional Latin American and Iberian centres – these texts position literature as a vital space of resistance, memory, and cultural transformation. Considering the dominant focus of postcolonial studies on Anglophone African literature, engaging with the Spanish-language corpus emerges as a critical intervention. This approach complements broader postcolonial critiques such as those of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), who underscores the centrality of language in the politics of decolonisation and identity formation.

While the Global Hispanophone provides a productive framework for examining transnational and multilingual literary practices, the present study approaches it critically,

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echoing scholarship that cautions against its potential to homogenize diverse geopolitical and historical contexts under a singular label. The texts analysed here challenge the linguistic and epistemic hierarchies embedded in the Spanish canon, resisting the centripetal pull of dominant Hispanic paradigms. They emphasize embodiment, emotional expression, linguistic multiplicity, and testimonial storytelling to decentre national and monolingual constructions of identity and migration. Ultimately, they construct what can be termed affective cartographies – embodied, emotional, linguistic, and spatial mappings that resist colonial erasure and envision alternative modes of belonging.

The discussion is guided by two central questions: How exactly do these works employ emotional and linguistic strategies to challenge dominant discourses on space and national identity? And, how do the selected novels reimagine space and identity to offer new ways of understanding postcolonial realities? These questions frame the analysis of emotional registers, narrative structures, metaphors, and testimonial voices, offering a critical lens through which to examine literature as a space of affective and political resistance.

Contributing to recent scholarship in affect theory and Global Hispanophone studies, this inquiry foregrounds African diasporic narratives that interrogate the erasure of Afro-descendant experiences in transnational Spanish-language discourse. Rather than adopting the Global Hispanophone as a fixed or unified field, it engages with its potential as a centrifugal, decolonial project – attuned to plural geographies, hybrid linguistic realities, and the affective dimensions of displacement.

Ultimately, it argues that African diasporic literature in Spanish not only reflects the lived realities of dislocation and hybridity but also constructs generative spaces where memory, affect, and language converge to resist invisibility and assert presence. In doing so, literature becomes a site through which trauma is processed, identities are negotiated, and solidarities are imagined.

Reimagining the narrative of Africa necessitates a transnational approach that considers the deep interconnections of African histories, both within the continent and globally. The collective memories of Africa, shaped by intersecting structures of slavery, racism, and colonization, are not confined to one region but are part of a larger web of global experiences. These memories are intricately connected across different geographies, challenging the traditional view of African history as isolated or studied by nations. By approaching African literature through this transnational framework, we recognize its potential as a space of resistance, solidarity, and transformation.

As Justo Bolekia Boleká (2018, p. 23) emphasizes:

La literatura social de los escritores guineoecuatorianos se convierte en el único espacio donde la víctima de las atrocidades de los regímenes políticos dictatoriales (colonización y postcolonización) encuentra a las ‘personas’ con quienes puede practicar una terapia colectiva y convertirse en promotor de ese mundo real que todos anhelan. [African writers’ social literature becomes the only space where victims of atrocities by political dictatorial regimes (colonization and postcolonization) find others with whom they can practice collective therapy and become promoters of the real world they all yearn for.]

This powerful statement underscores the role of literature as a form of political critique and emotional recovery. In this space, African diasporic voices are able to connect, share experiences, and engage in collective memory work, ultimately resisting historical erasure and reimagining a world of solidarity and shared identity.

## Linguistic and geographic framework

Spanish-language African literature emerges from complex colonial and postcolonial histories that span both the African continent and the Iberian Peninsula. Equatorial Guinea and northern Morocco, in particular, share intertwined legacies of Spanish colonialism that continue to shape their linguistic landscapes, political realities, and literary production. Historically framed as peripheries of empire, these regions have long been sites of cultural exchange. Today, their contemporary diasporic authors foreground memory, identity, and resistance.

Equatorial Guinea, the only African country where Spanish is an official language, was a Spanish colony from 1778 until independence in 1968. Since then, it has experienced prolonged authoritarian rule, first under Francisco Macías Nguema and, from 1979 onward, under Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. This context of repression and censorship has deeply informed the country's literary output. Writers such as Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel and Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo use Spanish both to critique colonial legacies and to expose the abuses of the postcolonial state.

The country's linguistic landscape is remarkably plural. Alongside Spanish, ancestral languages such as Fang, Bubi, and Benga are widely spoken, while French and Portuguese hold official status. This multilingualism shapes literary expression, allowing oral traditions and African cosmologies to merge with European literary forms. For many authors, Spanish remains a contested medium – at once a colonial imposition and a powerful tool for cultural expression.

One key feature of this linguistic tapestry is Pidgin English, locally known as Pichi or Pichinglis. Predominantly spoken on Bioko Island, Pichi has its roots in the nineteenth-century arrival of freed slaves from Sierra Leone and Liberia, later reinforced by Nigerian labourers. Though Spanish dominates formal settings, Pichi functions as the lingua franca of Bioko, central to everyday life and interethnic communication. Despite attempts by colonial and postcolonial regimes to suppress it, the language has endured and spread to urban centres on the mainland through internal migration and regional contact. Its resilience illustrates how language becomes a strategic and affective expression of identity in postcolonial conditions.

A further layer of linguistic complexity is found on the island of Annobón, where Fa d'Ambô – a Portuguese-based creole – continues to be spoken. Maintained largely through oral tradition, Fa d'Ambô remains marginalised, lacking official recognition or standardised writing. Yet its persistence affirms the value of oral knowledge systems and serves as a form of epistemic resistance to colonial hierarchies.

Northern Morocco, though under Spanish protectorate from 1912 to 1956, still bears linguistic and cultural traces of Spanish influence. The Rif region, in particular, has long asserted its Amazigh identity and resistance to colonial rule, most notably during the 1920s Rif War. The primary language, Tarifit, remains central to local identity, with strong diasporic ties to Spain.

Spanish continues to play a meaningful role in the work of Moroccan authors such as Mohamed El Morabet and Karima Ziali, who write in the language to explore migration, displacement, and selfhood. For these writers, Spanish is not merely a colonial remnant but a language of emotional resonance and diasporic articulation. At the same time, Moroccan multilingualism extends further: authors like Asmaa Aouattah, who writes in

Catalan, foreground Amazigh identity and linguistic plurality as integral to the Rif's literary landscape (Junyent & Comellas, 2023). These examples illustrate how Iberian languages become tools of expression for Riffian and Amazigh writers, complicating monolingual narratives of cultural production.

In both Equatorial Guinea and Morocco, diaspora and mobility are central to the literary imagination. Contemporary narratives refuse fixed geographic anchors, instead moving across borders and temporalities to trace histories of colonial violence, exile, and the search for belonging. While this study focuses on these two regions, it is important to note that they are not the only African contexts where literature in Spanish is produced; other areas, such as the Western Sahara, also contribute to this growing and heterogeneous field. These works challenge reductive representations of Africa by blending oral traditions, colonial languages, and global literary forms – opening space for critical memory, cultural renewal, and self-representation.

## Theoretical framework

This work draws upon two intersecting theoretical frameworks: the emotional turn in cultural theory and the decolonial turn in postcolonial and epistemological studies. These frameworks are particularly suited to analysing diasporic African literature in Spanish, where space, language, memory, and identity are intricately entangled with colonial histories and affective geographies. These theoretical approaches not only inform the conceptual framing of diaspora and migration but also guide the close readings of narrative structure, voice, and space in the literary texts discussed.

Affect theory, especially as developed by Sara Ahmed (2004, 2014) and Gilles Deleuze (1994), underpins the reading of space and emotion throughout the article. Ahmed's (2014) concept of affective economies theorises how emotions circulate socially and attach themselves to bodies, narratives, and geographies. This is particularly relevant in spaces like Mount Gurugu, Melilla, or immigrant shelters, which carry both physical and emotional weight for displaced populations. In *Circle of Women*, these affective circuits are especially visible in the circulation of grief and solidarity among women, where emotion itself becomes a connective tissue across geographies.

Deleuze's notion of affect – as developed with Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), and understood as pre-personal intensity and the potential for becoming – helps articulate how characters experience migration not as a linear journey, but as a field of ruptures, resonances, and transformations. Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome also informs the analysis of literary form: these texts eschew linear, hierarchical narratives in favour of fragmentary, plural, and polyphonic structures, mirroring the complex, non-linear geographies of diaspora. For instance, in *The Gurugu Pledge*, the rhizomatic narrative structure reflects the discontinuities, repetitions, and dispersions that shape migrant life on the mountain – transforming the story into a web of collective memory rather than an individual trajectory.

Decolonial theory further grounds this work, particularly the writings of Ramón Grosfoguel (2007), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), and Alison Phipps (2019). Grosfoguel's work on the colonality of power offers a lens to examine how the lingering effects of empire are embedded in language, identity, and epistemology – even after formal decolonisation. This is particularly relevant in the case of Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish

colony, where Spanish remains an official language, and in northern Morocco, once governed under a Spanish protectorate. These colonial legacies continue to shape linguistic practices, migration routes, and cultural identities – elements that deeply inform the novels studied here. Mohamed El Morabet's *An Abandoned Plot*, for example, uses Spanish not simply as a colonial remnant but as a medium of ambivalence and emotional negotiation, reframing it as a diasporic and affective language.

The emphasis on testimonial voice and orality in these texts also connects to decolonial epistemologies, where embodied knowledge, memory, and oral tradition serve as counter-hegemonic tools. Ahmed (2014) explains that her project is to 'track how emotions circulate between bodies, examining how they "stick" as well as move' (p. 4). This insight frames orality not only as a mode of resistance but also as a carrier of emotional inheritance.

By combining affective and decolonial approaches, this paper interprets diasporic literature not simply as documentation of theoretical migration, but as a site of epistemic resistance and emotional re-mapping. Literature becomes a space where authors challenge colonial narratives, reclaim oral and multilingual traditions, and reconstruct emotional and cultural geographies. This framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how space is imagined, experienced, and resisted, especially in contexts marked by border regimes, historical erasure, and language politics (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Phipps, 2019).

## Literature review

This study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to decentre Spanish literary studies by foregrounding African and diasporic voices. Scholars such as Julia Borst (2019) and Marvin Lewis (2007) argue that the exclusion of African literature written in Spanish reflects enduring colonial hierarchies and Eurocentric canons. Their work calls for deeper engagement with marginalised narratives that centre displacement, affect, and linguistic hybridity – an imperative to which the present work responds.

A foundational concept in this area is Mbare Ngom's (2013) notion of 'trans-systemic' literature, which challenges the perceived homogeneity of Hispanic literary traditions. Rather than viewing African texts in Spanish as colonial remnants, Ngom positions them as part of a vibrant, multilingual intellectual tradition. This approach reframes literary production from former Spanish colonies as sites of epistemological innovation and cultural agency, rooted in African cosmologies and oral traditions.

The ethnographic and sociolinguistic research of Yolanda Aixelà-Cabré (2017, 2020) offers crucial context for understanding the colonial and postcolonial legacies that continue to shape literary expression in regions such as Equatorial Guinea and northern Morocco. Her studies highlight how linguistic multiplicity and memory are deeply entwined with histories of repression, mobility, and identity formation, while also addressing the invisibility and marginalization of Equatoguinean communities in Spain's collective memory of its colonial past. In this regard, Aixelà engages with Rizo's (2012) concept of state-promoted amnesia, which underscores how colonial violence is often silenced in Spanish historiography and cultural discourse. Such insights support literary analysis attentive to how these contexts manifest in narrative form and language use.

Recent scholarship has also drawn attention to the need to broaden the scope of literary criticism beyond dominant linguistic and regional traditions. Works such as *Molts camins per caminar* (Junyent & Comellas, 2023) offer a panoramic view of African literatures – including the Hispanophone, Amazigh, and Bubi traditions – while calling for a critical framework that moves beyond Eurocentric and monolingual paradigms. Although African authors may be increasingly visible in European literary circuits, their classification within national or linguistic traditions remains unsettled, particularly in contexts shaped by exile, censorship, and translation. This expanding critical landscape aligns with Alison Phipps's (2012) theorization of 'linguistic hospitality', a model that frames multilingual and diasporic narratives as sites of negotiation, care, and epistemic plurality.

In sum, this article engages with a dynamic field of literary and cultural criticism that foregrounds multilingualism, affect, and the legacy of colonial power. By building on this interdisciplinary discourse, it affirms the significance of African literature written in Spanish as a site of creative resistance, cultural production, and epistemic renewal – one that challenges conventional boundaries and reimagines the contours of Spanish-language literary studies.

## Methodology

### *Corpus selection and authorial context*

This paper focuses on three contemporary African authors who write in Spanish: Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, Ángela Nzambi, and Mohamed El Morabet. These authors were selected for how their works address diasporic experience, migration, and multilingual identity from distinct but complementary perspectives. Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel (Equatorial Guinea, 1966) is an Afro-Hispanic novelist and political activist who has lived in exile in Spain since 2011, following his protest against the dictatorship in his home country (Figueroa-Vásquez, 2020). His novel *The Gurugu Pledge* is set in the migrant camp on Mount Gurugu, near Melilla – a liminal space at the Spanish-Moroccan border where hundreds of Africans wait to cross into Europe. This real borderland becomes narrative material in Ávila Laurel's polyphonic novel, which features multiple migrant voices recounting their experiences, creating a choral representation of contemporary migration (Ávila Laurel, 2017). His political activism and exile position inform a literary voice that is both critical and empathetic, weaving subversive humour and non-linear structure to document the harsh realities of displacement.

Ángela Nzambi (Equatorial Guinea, 1971) is a feminist writer and cultural mediator based in Valencia, Spain. Her work explores migration and gender through testimonial and empowering perspectives. Nzambi's collaborative project *Circle of Women: Stories for Transformation* (*Círculo de mujeres: Relatos para transformar*) blends fiction and testimony to amplify the voices of displaced women and promote solidarity and transformation (CEAR PV, 2020). The book includes short stories and lived experiences shared by refugees, volunteers, and workers within migrant reception centres in Spain. Nzambi's narrative style, shaped by her work as a human rights advocate, blurs genre boundaries and highlights the affective and communal aspects of female migration. Her perspective as an Afrodescendant migrant woman enriches her literary voice with a decolonial



sensibility, contesting racism and patriarchy while emphasizing collective strength and intergenerational memory.

Mohamed El Morabet (Al Hoceima, Morocco, 1983) is a Moroccan-born writer and translator who has lived in Spain since 2002. His debut novel *An Abandoned Plot* (*Un solar abandonado*) tells the story of Ismael, a young translator returning to his hometown in the Rif to attend his grandmother's funeral. The narrative intertwines memory, dream, and migration, illustrating the protagonist's emotional dislocation between Spain and Morocco. El Morabet's writing is introspective and lyrical, portraying the migratory journey as one marked by nostalgia and fragmentation. A key feature of the novel is its focus on language and translation: Ismael navigates between Spanish and Tamazight, a primarily oral Amazigh language that, in the novel, is remembered but not recorded. In this way, the novel dramatizes linguistic tension and epistemic absence, turning language into both a theme and a tool for reflecting on postcolonial identity. El Morabet's bicultural background as a diasporic writer shapes the authenticity of his voice, which critiques fixed notions of national and linguistic belonging.

### **Analytical approach**

The research adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology based on close textual analysis, guided by theoretical frameworks rooted in affect theory and decolonial studies. Literary texts are treated not merely as cultural artifacts, but as active spaces where emotions, politics, and histories converge. The focus is on how narrative structure, voice, metaphor, and spatial representation generate meaning and resistance in the context of African diasporic literature written in Spanish.

The selection of primary texts is informed by their shared focus on migration, diaspora, and identity within a postcolonial Spanish-speaking context. These works represent different regions (Equatorial Guinea and Morocco), genders, and narrative styles, and each offers a situated response to the enduring effects of colonialism and displacement.

The analysis is enriched by attention to geopolitical histories that frame the texts. For example, Equatorial Guinea, the only African country where Spanish is an official language, embodies a unique postcolonial condition where the language of the coloniser remains central to education, governance, and literature. Similarly, northern Morocco and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla are emblematic of ongoing colonial borders in Africa – sites where racialised migration policies meet lived realities of transnational mobility. Mount Gurugu, in particular, serves as a real and symbolic space of liminality, where displaced people confront both material deprivation and the emotional weight of Europe's border politics.

The method of literary close reading is used to examine how these realities are encoded in narrative strategies: oral storytelling, testimonial voice, rhizomatic structure, and multilingual expression. Given the hybrid narrative forms and multilingual strategies these texts employ, close reading becomes essential for attending to the nuances of voice, tone, and structure that may otherwise be overlooked in large-scale thematic or quantitative analysis. Following Ahmed (2004, 2014), the study traces how emotions are not only represented but circulate within and beyond the text, shaping how space and identity are felt and politicised. From a decolonial perspective, informed by



Grosfoguel (2007) and Phipps (2019), the analysis questions whose voices are legitimised and how colonial legacies continue to shape linguistic and affective hierarchies.

In this way, the methodology enables a reading of literature as both affective and epistemic terrain – a medium through which diasporic authors reimagine identity, resist exclusion, and forge new forms of belonging across languages and borders.

With these three authors and their works as the core corpus, this study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in close textual reading and informed by affect theory (Ahmed, 2004, 2014; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and decolonial theory (Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Phipps, 2019). First, each text is closely analysed to examine how space, language, and emotion are constructed within the narrative. Spatial representation is key – whether in the form of Mount Gurugu's border limbo, urban centres of exile, or symbolic homeland spaces. These are not neutral settings but emotionally charged geographies shaped by postcolonial history, social exclusion, and memory. These liminal spaces are central to how migration is experienced, aligning with decolonial frameworks that underscore how space and territory are lived differently by colonial and diasporic subjects.

Second, this study uses affect theory to explore the emotional structure of each narrative. The texts organise their discourse around specific emotional registers: *The Gurugu Pledge* juxtaposes black humour and empathy to humanize marginalised migrants; *Circle of Women* mobilizes testimony to foster empathy and solidarity, highlighting emotional resilience in the face of gendered migration; *An Abandoned Plot* immerses the reader in nostalgia and alienation through lyrical memory and temporal dislocation. Drawing on theorists such as Ahmed (2004, 2014) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), this analysis treats emotions not as private states but as socially embedded forces that mediate relationships to space, language, and community.

Third, informed by decolonial theory (Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Phipps, 2019), the study interprets each text's narrative and linguistic strategies as symbolic resistance to colonial hierarchies. These African-Hispanic authors reclaim Spanish – a colonial language – as a medium of subaltern expression. Ávila Laurel's polyphony, structured around multilingual migrant groups, decentralizes hegemonic narration and highlights African linguistic plurality. Nzambi's hybrid testimonial-literary approach elevates subaltern female voices while challenging Eurocentric literary norms. El Morabet's narrative tension between orality and written language reflects the colonial wound of linguistic loss and gestures toward decolonial re-signification. Writing in Spanish becomes a complex act of infiltration and subversion – both an insertion into the canon and a redefinition of its borders through affect and multilingualism.

Finally, this methodology acknowledges the personal and political positioning of each author as integral to their literary voice. Literature is treated not as a detached aesthetic object but as an extension of lived experience and ideological orientation. Ávila Laurel's experience of exile and authoritarian repression informs his ironic yet empathic representation of marginalization. Nzambi's activist and feminist practice shapes her literary commitment to justice, care, and memory. El Morabet's bicultural formation underpins his introspective exploration of belonging and alienation. By foregrounding these authorial contexts, this methodology aligns with decolonial approaches that centre embodied knowledge and the historicity of narrative enunciation. In doing so, it interprets literature

as both an aesthetic and political act – a site where space, language, and affect coalesce to challenge colonial logics and imagine alternative futures.

### Analysis: affective cartographies into praxis

This section presents the central analysis of the article, exploring how selected texts map affective experiences and reimagine belonging through literature. Drawing on affect theory (Ahmed, 2004, 2014; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and decolonial theory (Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Phipps, 2019), it investigates how diasporic African literature in Spanish navigates emotional geographies, spatial displacement, linguistic hybridity, and narrative form. These narratives construct literature as a space of collective memory and intergenerational healing. The affective power of storytelling serves as a decolonial tool to recover silenced histories and build emotional resilience. This is particularly resonant in women's narratives, where testimony and embodied memory form the connective tissue of diasporic belonging.

### Reimagining space: from *Borderlands* to decolonial infrastructures

Diasporic African literature frequently reimagines space not as a neutral backdrop, but as a contested and symbolically charged terrain shaped by colonial history, marginalization, and the desire for liberation. Across *The Gurugu Pledge*, *Circle of Women*, and *An Abandoned Plot*, spatial reconfigurations unsettle dominant geographies, producing what Walter D. Mignolo (2000) terms a decolonial gaze – a way of seeing and inhabiting space that refuses Eurocentric spatial hierarchies and colonial logics.

In this context, Mount Gurugu and the nearby Spanish enclave of Melilla are not depicted as mere transit zones but as politically saturated spaces marked by historical injustice. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of *rhizomatic space*, the novel refuses linear migration narratives. Instead, Mount Gurugu becomes a borderland of 'stuckedness' (Hage, 2009), a space of waiting and resistance where time and geography are disjointed. Although Melilla belongs administratively to Spain, its physical location in North Africa lays bare the contradictions of colonial cartography. As the novel puts it, Mount Gurugu is 'the backdoor to cherished Europe' (Ávila, 2017, p. 45), a phrase that captures both the aspirational pull of Europe and the bitter irony of its violent exclusionary practices.

This landscape is not just symbolically loaded but rendered through lived, affective experience. In an early scene, the narrator reflects:

We lived in the forest and cooked enough to still be standing. We gathered firewood and went down into Farkhana to buy fish, or to pretend to buy fish in the hope that some charitable soul would give us some. Of course, if they did, it would always be the least substantial part, such as the head or the bones. But it would provide a little nourishment and warmth, and it was cold in the residence, much colder than on the banks of the River Ruu, where I was born, and saw others born, those I left behind to go in search of new rivers, different riverbanks. (Ávila, 2017, p. 9).

Here, the mountain is not merely a geographic location but a zone of embodied memory and colonial residue. The cold and hunger evoke not just physical discomfort but the affective weight of displacement. The narrator's longing for rivers left behind weaves

space, history, and kinship into an emotionally saturated geography of exile and survival. The terrain becomes a site of political critique and imaginative resistance – what Grosfoquel (2007) calls the coloniality of power in spatial form.

A very different kind of spatial intervention takes place in *Circle of Women*. The text opens with a deliberate arrangement: ‘Las sillas estaban colocadas en círculo’ [The chairs were arranged in a circle] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 19). This seemingly mundane detail signals a radical rethinking of space. The circle becomes a decolonial infrastructure (Tlostanova, 2018), a spatial form rooted in horizontal power, mutual recognition, and collective presence. Unlike the verticality of courtrooms, classrooms, or clinics – spaces governed by surveillance, hierarchy, and institutional authority – the circle invites shared vulnerability and co-authorship. As the text notes:

Las sillas estaban colocadas en círculo —hay distintas percepciones y teorías detrás de esa disposición, tanto en las aulas como en otros procesos de comunicación en grupos—. [The chairs were arranged in a circle—there are different perceptions and theories behind this arrangement, both in classrooms and in other group communication settings.] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 19)

This is not just spatial design, but an epistemological commitment. The circular formation draws on Afro-diasporic and Indigenous epistemologies, where circles carry ritual, pedagogical, and cosmological meaning. Within the project, it becomes a living space where migrant women reclaim their voices, where testimony becomes knowledge, and where healing is made structurally possible through space itself.

Similarly, *An Abandoned Plot* reclaims space through the lens of return. As the narrator travels from Madrid to Al Hoceima, he reflects:

Vi la nube de Madrid, estaba delante de mí. Me persiguió por la carretera como si me echara de menos. Era ella, aquella nube sombría a la que tanto me acostumbré. Esa oscuridad que provocaba en las almas errantes el sentimiento del sin rumbo, viajaba conmigo, sin que yo la hubiera invitado, rumbo al sur. [I saw the Madrid cloud, it was in front of me. It followed me along the road as if it missed me. It was that sombre cloud I had grown so used to. That darkness, which instilled in wandering souls the feeling of being adrift, was traveling with me, uninvited, heading south.] (El Morabet, 2018, p. 91)

This moment is deeply symbolic. The cloud functions as an affective tether – a soft, floating reminder of a past that is not left behind but follows, adapts, and transforms. The image collapses the binary between metropolitan centre and peripheral homeland, suggesting that affective geographies are migratory, not fixed (Ahmed, 2014). As the narrative unfolds, the return to the family’s plot of land is both literal and figurative: it is a homecoming, a confrontation with absence, and a reclamation of space historically devalued by colonial displacement.

The family plot, though labelled ‘abandoned’, becomes a site of remembrance and re-rooting – a quiet, persistent geography where ancestral presence, dispossession, and future imagining converge. Like Mount Gurugu and the testimonial circle, it is not a passive space but an active one, remade through narrative and memory.

Across all three texts, space is re-signified through a decolonial lens (Mignolo, 2000): not as terrain carved by empire, but as ground for community, resistance, and alternative world-making. Whether in the mountains of Gurugu, the ritual circles of refugee care, or the familial landscapes of North Africa, diasporic African literature foregrounds how spatial imagination is central to the project of decolonial transformation.

### Emotion, embodiment, and affective resistance

If diasporic African literature reimagines space as politically saturated and symbolically charged, it is affect that gives these spaces depth, resonance, and relational meaning. Affect is not merely an emotional undercurrent but a method of critique, survival, and epistemic resistance. Following Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies (2014), emotion is not private but circulates across bodies and spaces, shaping what becomes intelligible and liveable. Taken together, these texts illustrate how affect functions as a decolonial force – refusing Western binaries of mind/body, reason/emotion, and offering instead relational, embodied ways of knowing and becoming.

In *The Gurugu Pledge*, Mount Gurugu is not only a contested borderland but an emotionally saturated terrain. The novel's opening vividly evokes how hunger, memory, and cold bind the physical space to a history of loss and longing:

We lived in the forest and cooked enough to still be standing ... it was cold in the residence, much colder than on the banks of the River Ruo, where I was born ... those I left behind to go in search of new rivers, different riverbanks. (Ávila, 2017, p. 9)

This passage foregrounds affect as embodied, collective knowledge. The reference to rivers and birthplaces suggests that memory is not merely reflective but spatially and emotionally situated. Coldness and hunger function as registers of dislocation. In Ahmed's (2014) terms, affect 'sticks' to this place – Mount Gurugu becomes dense with emotional and historical residue. This is not a landscape of passage but one of saturation.

Crucially, *The Gurugu Pledge* positions affect not only as pain or endurance, but also as narrative agency. Storytelling itself becomes an affective ritual of resistance:

After eating, ... we warmed our hands over the fire, curled up on our cardboard, or under our blankets, and settled down to listen to people's stories. I always acted as though I had no story to tell, as though I had nothing to say. (Ávila, 2017, p. 9)

Here, silence is charged with trauma, humility, and solidarity. The act of withholding one's story becomes an affective gesture – a refusal that carries weight. This scene reframes narrative agency as the ability not only to speak, but to decide when and how to speak.

The novel's affective arc culminates in a radical gesture of refusal. Rather than fulfil the presumed trajectory of crossing into Europe, the narrator turns back:

"I chose the southern face." (Ávila, 2017, p. 183)

This choice enacts what Walter Dignolo (2009) calls epistemic disobedience – a rejection of the colonial framing that positions Europe as the apex of salvation and modernity. Affect here becomes not only emotion but political capacity: the emotional weight of experience leads to a reorientation of desire, toward African epistemologies and solidarities.

If *The Gurugu Pledge* stages affect through hunger, silence, and refusal, *Circle of Women* constructs affect as a shared infrastructure of healing, testimony, and embodied memory. The physical arrangement of the women's group – 'Las sillas estaban colocadas en círculo' [The chairs were arranged in a circle] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 19) – signifies a decolonial geometry of care.

The circle becomes an affective architecture – a space of horizontal power, where bodies are not objectified but recognized. Within this circle, women engage in processes of emotional and bodily reclamation:

Hablaron respectivamente de dar a conocer el cuerpo, de indentificar y saber gestionar las emociones y los sentimientos, de aquellos mensajes que la persona se transmitía a sí misma y que dificultaba su bienestar. [They spoke about getting to know the body, about identifying and managing emotions and feelings, about the messages one sends to oneself that obstruct well-being.] (Nzambi, 2020, pp. 19–20).

Here, affective knowledge is foregrounded – not as irrational or private, but as methodological and epistemically valid. This breaks from Western dualisms by affirming emotion as part of self-knowing and communal survival.

One of the most powerful images from *Circle of Women* evokes this rupture with colonial scripts of silence and containment:

La liberación podía ser como un árbol que se arranca desde la raíz y va cayendo hasta desplomarse ... alza los brazos con fuerza y le sale un grito de las entrañas. Lo que quedaría es una asunción de sí misma alejada de los mitos. [Liberation could be like a tree ripped out from its roots, falling until it collapses ... she raises her arms in strength and lets out a scream from deep within.] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 23)

This scream is not catharsis in the therapeutic sense; it is an embodied rupture – a sonic act of resistance. Affect here is not symbolic but material – the scream emerges ‘de las entrañas’ [from the gut], signalling a refusal to be muted by trauma, discipline, or institutional discourse. This is affect as method, as interruption, and as refusal of colonial affective regulation.

A similar politics of affect surfaces in the use of visual and sonic memory:

El relato me surge de algún hecho, suceso o acontecimiento de mi vida y de mi realidad: la de mi entorno, las personas con las que me encuentro y los espacios que frecuento. Es como la fotografía de un momento que me parece significativo y transcendental. [A story comes to me from an event, happening, or occurrence in my life and in my reality: that of my surroundings, the people I meet, and the spaces I frequent. It is like the photograph of a moment that I find meaningful and transcendent.] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 22)

Nzambi recalls: ‘Me acordé también del ‘Pata Pata’, internacionalizado por la sudafricana Miriam Makeba; un baile popular de los bares y tabernas ilegales de los suburbios de Johannesburgo durante el apartheid’ [Today I also remembered ‘Pata Pata’, popularised by the South African Miriam Makeba; a popular dance in the illegal bars and taverns of Johannesburg’s suburbs during apartheid] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 23). These metaphors and musical references form an Afro-diasporic archive – not ornamental, but foundational. The photograph resists the totalizing impulse of grand narratives. The music recalls survival, rhythm, and community – a counter-history where joy is also an act of resistance.

The body itself becomes a site of storytelling: ‘Como si considerase suficiente la historia que portaba en su piel’ [As if the story she carried on her skin was enough] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 22). This is affect as inscription – where memory is not only told but worn. It echoes Sylvia Wynter’s (2003) call to move beyond the colonial construction of ‘Man’ and toward forms of being human otherwise. Within the circle, the body is not an object of regulation but a source of epistemic legitimacy.

Following Deleuze (1995/2006), affect precedes representation; it is pre-linguistic intensity, the force that enables movement and transformation. In *Circle of Women*, affect is not the residue of trauma but a modality of knowledge production. Bodies tremble, scream, remember, and resist – not as metaphor, but as method.

This emphasis on affect as migratory, atmospheric, and relational continues in *An Abandoned Plot*. As the narrator journeys back from Madrid to Al Hoceima, affect travels with him: '*Vi la nube de Madrid ... viajaba conmigo ... rumbo al sur*' [I saw the Madrid cloud ... it was traveling with me ... heading south] (El Morabet, 2018, p. 91).

The cloud functions as an emotional tether, collapsing the spatial binaries between centre and periphery. The journey south is not only geographic – it is affective, epistemological, and symbolic.

Later, while crossing the sea: '*El mar se tornó bravo y enfadado*' [The sea turned rough and angry] (El Morabet, 2018, p. 135). Here, the sea becomes emotionally legible – mirroring grief, uncertainty, and spatial disorientation. Ahmed's (2006) notion of disorientation is apt: affect in this scene mediates the instability of return, of not belonging fully to either space, of being carried by forces beyond control.

### **Language and the politics of voice**

If space is the site and affect the medium through which diasporic subjects contest colonial legacies, then language is the most contested terrain of all – where power, identity, and knowledge are most intimately negotiated. In these narratives, language is not a neutral vehicle for representation but a decolonial force in itself. It bears the weight of empire, yet also offers pathways to reimagine the self and the world. Each text engages with linguistic hybridity – through oral traditions, creoles, code-switching, silence, and poetry – as a strategy of epistemic resistance.

Drawing on Grosfoguel's (2007) concept of the coloniality of power, language is revealed to be a tool historically used to sort, stratify, and govern colonial subjects. In *The Gurugu Pledge*, this dynamic is exposed through the subtle mapping of colonial hierarchies onto speech:

Everyone on the mountain came from the heart of Africa, had a past like Peter Ngambo and a brilliant future that awaited them in Europe. They were divided into groups defined by language, for they generally either spoke French and English, although there was a subgroup of people who spoke the language of Senegal ... (Ávila Laurel, 2017, p. 25)

Here, linguistic groups stand in for colonial histories – French and English denoting former imperial authorities, indexing not only geography but imposed histories of governance, religion, and education. Language becomes a social border, demarcating whose stories are intelligible, and to whom.

A particularly sharp critique of linguistic imperialism emerges in a moment of dark irony: 'Eat or manger, depending on which History the whites chose for you' (Ávila Laurel, 2017, p. 65). This line reveals the absurd arbitrariness of colonial linguistic legacies – how the colonizer's choice of language becomes fate. The pun registers both the violence and the ridiculousness of colonial power over speech.

Yet even within these imposed structures, language in *The Gurugu Pledge* becomes a communal and relational practice, anchored in oral storytelling: 'I would like to continue my story', said Peter Ngambo, 'the story of how I ended up in the residence ... but only after another brother has had the opportunity to tell his story' (Ávila Laurel, 2017, p. 26).

Here, narration is not about dominance or performance but reciprocity. It reflects a non-Western logic of story-sharing as relational pedagogy, where the voice is both offered and withheld as part of an affective economy of mutual recognition.

If *The Gurugu Pledge* foregrounds language as shaped by colonial history, *Women's Circle* explores how women reclaim narrative authority through hybrid and embodied forms of expression. Language is not deployed to seek validation but to produce situated, resistant knowledge: '*El relato me surge de algún hecho ... es como la fotografía de un momento*' [The story arises from some real event ... it is like a photograph of a moment] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 22). This metaphor – story as a photograph – frames storytelling as a fragmented, affective archive, resonating with Saidiya Hartman's (2008) idea of situated fabulation: the creative act of making legible lives and knowledges that have been silenced or erased. These are not universalizing stories but intimate, partial truths. The refusal to generalize is a feminist, decolonial gesture, one that troubles both the aesthetics of objectivity and the politics of empathy.

Artists in *Circle of Women* – the dancer, flautist, and storyteller – embody this decolonial voice: '*Las tres últimas en presentarse fueron una danzarina, la que tocaba la flauta y la que escribía relatos. Estas me ayudaron a entender a las demás*'. [The last three to introduce themselves were a dancer, a flutist, and a storyteller ... they helped me understand the others] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 21). Their presence affirms that language is not only verbal or written – it can be sonic, gestural, embodied. They represent epistemic figures aligned with Sylvia Wynter's (2003) call to decentre dominant, colonial models of subjectivity rooted in exclusionary definitions of reason. Through art, these women enact alternative, communal modes of knowledge production, where creativity is not an aesthetic afterthought but a core epistemological method.

This politics of storytelling continues: '*Y aunque no todo lo que nos ocurre depende de nosotras, sí lo hace el modo en que lo gestionamos. Y por eso todo relato enseña*' [Not everything that happens to us depends on us; what does is the way we manage it. And that is why every story teaches] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 22). Here, narrative is reclaimed as agency, not evidence. It is a form of world-making – of managing meaning, forming community, and resisting objectification. The narrator – a community facilitator – reflects: '*Durante la entrevista intentaron enfocarse en ello, huyendo de espacios comunes como formaciones o disciplinas académicas en la que se pretende enmarcar los saberes y el actuar de las personas*' [During the interview, they tried to focus on that, avoiding familiar spaces like academic training or disciplines where knowledge and behaviour are predefined] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 17).

En la ronda de presentaciones me centré en escuchar ese algo que sabían hacer y querían ofrecer ... Eran conceptos cotidianos: cuerpo, emociones, sentimientos, mensajes, motivos, potencia, talento, creatividad ... no sabía que hubiera personas que se dedicaran a conocer su naturaleza y sus efectos sobre la gente ... Era como si estuviera escuchando ... diosas bajando de sus olimpos, rodeadas de un halo de misterio. [In the introduction round I focused on listening to that something they knew how to do and wanted to share ... They were everyday concepts: body, emotions, feelings, messages, motives, power, talent, creativity ... I didn't know there were people who dedicated themselves to understanding their nature and their effects on others ... It was as if I were listening to ... goddesses descending from their Olympus, surrounded by an aura of mystery.] (Nzambi, 2020, pp. 17–20)



This is a revaluation of non-institutional knowledge, where the emotional, creative, and somatic are fully legitimate sites of learning. These women are not merely sharing stories – they are doing theory through lived experience.

In *An Abandoned Plot*, the linguistic politics of decoloniality take root in oral tradition and creative writing. The narrator reflects on his grandmother's storytelling: '*De noche me contaba cuentos ... Cuentos que le había contado, a su vez, su abuela. Esa era su tradición. La oral*' [At night, she told me stories ... stories her grandmother had once told her. That was her tradition: oral tradition] (El Morabet, 2018, pp. 105–106). Here, oral knowledge is not primitive or secondary – it is the root system of cultural continuity. Writing, too, becomes a process of becoming, not simply a literary act:

Encendí el ordenador y un cigarro ... 'Me dolía. El pasado me dolía', tecleé con un impulso insensato, como una ráfaga de iluminación forastera ... Me condujo a la realidad del sonido del tecleo que guiaría mi ficción. Me acarició. Escribir me acarició. [I turned on the computer and lit a cigarette ... 'It hurt. The past hurt me', I typed with a senseless impulse, like a burst of foreign illumination ... It led me to the reality of the clicking sound that would guide my fiction. It caressed me. Writing caressed me.] (El Morabet, 2018, pp. 201–202) This 'clicking sound' gestures toward linguistic and cultural origins – perhaps echoing ancestral languages or rhythmic forms. It is through language that the narrator comes into herself, reclaiming both subjectivity and heritage.

Across all three texts, language is never neutral – it is a terrain of struggle and possibility. Colonial legacies are inscribed in vocabulary, grammar, and accent, but they are also disrupted through silence, rhythm, orality, and embodiment. In *Circle of Women*, this collective transformation is made explicit:

Tampoco tenía la impresión de que hablásemos lenguajes distintos. La persona que asistiera a las cinco sesiones ... al final tendría que haber crecido, cambiado en algo, o por lo menos contar con los recursos para ello ... [I did not have the impression that we spoke different languages. A person who attended the five sessions ... in the end, they must have grown, changed in some way, or at least have the resources to do so ...] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 24). This is not the language of neoliberal empowerment but of affective pedagogy – transformation through story, listening, and shared emotional labour. Language is not a tool of mastery but of mutual world-building. The final line seals this ethos: '*Y así surgió el Círculo de Mujeres Construyendo Juntas*' [That's how the *Circle of Women Building Together* came about] (Nzambi, 2020, p. 24). The phrase *Construyendo Juntas* [Building Together] names a decolonial ethic and method. Naming itself becomes a political act, affirming collective authorship over institutional imposition. In these texts, language becomes not just a means of survival or communication but a decolonial tool of expression, memory, and solidarity.

### **Comparative reflections: narrative as affective and decolonial practice**

This article explores how contemporary African diasporic literature written in Spanish – *The Gurugu Pledge*, *Circle of Woman*, and *An Abandoned Plot* – performs a radical narrative reconfiguration of space, language, and emotion. Drawing from affect theory (Ahmed, 2004, 2014; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), decolonial thought (Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Phipps, 2019), and pedagogical critique, these texts generate what can be understood as affective cartographies: narrative geographies shaped by grief,

care, memory, and imagination, where spatial and linguistic motifs become sites of resistance and creative reimagination. These narratives unsettle conventional conceptions of geography, reframing space not as a neutral backdrop or fixed border but as an affectively charged, politically saturated terrain. Through motifs such as Mount Gurugu, the testimonial circle, and the abandoned family plot, the texts present rhizomatic landscapes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) – fragmented, nonlinear, and transgressive spaces that challenge Eurocentric migration narratives and border epistemologies. Space becomes an active participant in the storytelling process, embodying both trauma and resilience.

Emotion, similarly, is redefined. Rather than a marker of vulnerability, it emerges as a politically potent epistemology – a mode of knowing that circulates socially, binds bodies and histories, and drives narrative form. Following Ahmed's (2004, 2014) theory of affective economies, emotions such as hunger, silence, screaming, and music become modes of resistance that disrupt the humanitarian gaze and instead foreground embodied testimony, collective authorship, and relational knowledge production.

Language, the most contested site, is both a residue of colonial violence and a terrain for subversion. The deliberate repurposing of Spanish – through hybrid forms, creolized speech, and oral traditions – enacts what Grosfoguel (2007) terms epistemic disobedience, and what Phipps (2019) frames as a decolonial voice. These texts do not simply use Spanish – they transform it, destabilizing linguistic imperialism and asserting relationality, creativity, and refusal.

Crucially, these works operate not only as representations of African diasporic experience but as narrative interventions. They demand new reading practices that are both affectively engaged and epistemically decentred. Through their fragmented, polyvocal, and testimonial structures, they perform the very dislocation and resilience they narrate. Literature here becomes both a generative medium and a cartographic force: a space through which trauma is transformed into solidarity, and exile into grounds for cultural and political belonging.

This study contributes to the expanding field of Global Hispanophone and African diasporic literary studies by offering an interdisciplinary framework that bridges affect theory, decolonial critique, and critical pedagogy. While previous scholarship has advocated for the inclusion of African literature in Spanish within the broader Hispanic canon, this article advances the discourse by centring the emotional, spatial, and epistemic dimensions of diasporic storytelling.

Ultimately, these texts challenge monolingual, Eurocentric paradigms by positioning African diasporic literature in Spanish as both a reflection of lived experience and a radical praxis of reimagining identity, community, and belonging. They offer not only a literary intervention but a pedagogical one, inviting a rethinking of the classroom as an affective, relational space where multilingualism, memory, and embodiment are treated as legitimate and generative forms of knowledge. In doing so, these works not only narrate diaspora otherwise – they teach us how to feel, inhabit, and theorize it otherwise, too.

## Conclusion

Spanish-language African literature offers vital tools for rethinking migration, identity, and language through affective and decolonial frameworks. The selected texts do more than

depict diasporic experience – they actively intervene in its configuration, offering new ways to imagine community, resilience, and spatial belonging. Through storytelling as resistance, orality as epistemology, and emotion as political force, these narratives construct literary geographies where colonial legacies are not only confronted but imaginatively transformed.

These works generate multilingual, multivocal conversations that blur national borders and decentre cultural authority, challenging both linguistic hierarchies and the epistemic foundations of the Spanish literary canon. In reimagining space and subjectivity, they reconceptualise the *Global Hispanophone* – not as a fixed or unified field, but as a site of contradiction, hybridity, and ongoing negotiation. They invite scholars, educators, and readers to approach literature as a living, embodied, and decolonial practice – one rooted in affect, testimony, and the possibility of shared futures.

Significantly, this article positions literature as a pedagogical tool for reimagining space and identity. By attending to the affective geographies and oral storytelling practices embedded in these texts, it not only expands literary analysis but also proposes decolonial approaches to teaching and reading African literature in Spanish. In doing so, it frames literature as a transformative space where multilingualism, memory, and diasporic experience converge to challenge hegemonic narratives of migration, identity, and belonging.

To further develop the plurilingual and decolonial approach outlined here, future research might turn to African diasporic texts written not only in other Iberian languages such as Catalan, Basque, or Galician, but also in other minoritised or transnational languages with histories of marginalisation – such as Amazigh, Portuguese-based creoles, or local African languages. These linguistic traditions – shaped by their own histories of marginalisation – offer additional ground for reimagining the *Global Hispanophone* as a radically multilingual, contested, and generative cultural field.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

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